

October 1, 2010

Mr. Eric E. Schmidt
Chairman & Chief Executive Office
Google Inc.
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Schmidt:

We are writing to object to Google's "simplified" privacy policy that will take effect on October 3, 2010. In a post on Google's company blog on September 3, Mike Yang stated that the changes would make Google's privacy practices "more transparent and understandable." It will also reduce privacy safeguards for hundreds of millions of users of Google's Internet-based services.

Under this new policy, twelve specific Google privacy policies will be replaced by a single policy that will enable greater data sharing within the corporation. As Yang explained, "[s]ince contacts are shared between services like Gmail, Talk, Calendar and Docs, it makes sense for those services to be governed by one privacy policy."

The effect of these changes will be to diminish privacy protections for users of Google services. With this new policy, Google is now treating user data as part of an integrated platform. Previously, users could selectively reveal information to Google for the use of a particular service, such as email, document management, or mapping. Now, users will no longer be able to do so, and information previously provided for only one service can be transferred between Google services without user consent.

In the well known example of Google Buzz, the revised privacy policy could now allow Google to take the private contact information provided by a user for an email service and make it publicly available for a social network service. Instead of respecting user privacy preferences, you have chosen to overwrite them.

This unilateral change in Google's Terms of Service could be considered a material change subject to investigation by the Federal Trade Commission. Furthermore, the essence of an effective privacy policy is that personal information provided for a particular purpose is used for that purpose, not any purpose a company deems appropriate.

We urge the withdrawal of these proposed changes to Google's privacy policy and a greater commitment by your company to the privacy of users of Google's services.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Marc Rotenberg, President
Electronic Privacy Information Center

Lynne E. Bradley, Executive Director
American Library Association

Prof. Chip Pitts, Stanford Law School & Oxford University
President, Bill of Rights Defense Committee

Shahid Buttar, Executive Director
Bill of Rights Defense Committee

Jeffrey Chester, Executive Director
Center for Digital Democracy

Lisa Graves, Executive Director
Center for Media and Democracy

Susan Grant, Director of Consumer Protection
Consumer Federation of America

John Simpson
Consumer Watchdog

Kathryn Serkes, Chair
Doctor-Patient Medical Assn.

Aaron Titus, Information Privacy Director
Liberty Coalition

Dr. Deborah Peel, President
Patient Privacy Rights

Robert Ellis Smith, Publisher
Privacy Journal

Beth Givens, Director
Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

Dane vonBreichenruchardt, President
U.S. Bill of Rights Foundation

Pam Dixon, Executive Director
World Privacy Forum

Cc: FTC Chairman John Liebowitz